

Acknowledgements

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The proboscis: the "Achilles heel" of hawk-moths in southern Africa

In the early months of 1950, whilst employed in Bulawayo, southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), each evening I passed some large yellow tubular-flowered ornamental shrubs. Several large species of hawk-moth spent the short twilight hovering at the flowers to imbibe nectar; they included *Agrius convolvuli* (L.), *Daphnis nerii* (L.) and *Hippotion celerio* (L.) – well-known as immigrants to Britain. Commonly, when near a bush, a persistent fluttering noise, which did not abate upon approach, was found to emanate from a hawk-moth which had been entrapped by its proboscis, courtesy of a large praying mantis (Dictyoptera: Mantodea). This occurred almost every evening and in the morning a scattering of tell-tale wings beneath the bush bore witness to the success of the mantids (although bats may also have taken advantage of the situation?).

I have looked for evidence of this phenomenon elsewhere, but without success. Nor did I encounter it at Nassau, Bahamas, where a frequent evening pastime was to make the round of accessible *Frangipani* and other flowering shrubs where feeding hawk-moths would be silhouetted against the night sky immediately after dusk. In 1992, I revisited Louis Trichardt, northern Transvaal, but although the flowering shrubs in the hotel gardens attracted hawk-moths each evening they remained unmolested. Under somewhat different circumstances in a garden near Kpalimé, Republic of Togo, the previous year, were several large specimens of what were possibly the same species of shrub that I had found in Zimbabwe, or at least a close relative. These were attended by the large black-and-yellow butterfly *Papilio menestheus* Drury, which imbibed at the flowers with rapidly vibrating wings,

seemingly with impunity; hindwing tails were invariably intact, even with slightly worn specimens.

This rather bizarre mode of predation may or may not be common or widespread, but at the Bulawayo site it was a common and successful behavioural routine, made particularly interesting in view of the large size of the moths, the successful grasping of so tenuous a feature and the subsequent drawing in of the prey. I have not seen reference to this mode of behaviour before, although Kirkpatrick (1957, *Insect life in the tropics*) refers to a large hawk-moth being held and lifted by a leg more than twelve inches several times before being overpowered by a preying mantis.— B.K. WEST, 36 Briar Road, Dartford, Kent DA5 2HN.

Death-watch beetles *Xestobium rufovillosum* (Degeer) (Col.: Anobiidae) in the wild

Like A. A. Allen (1999, *Ent.Rec.* **111**: 222) I was surprised by Dr W. M. Blaney's (1998, *Antenna* **22**: 190-200) comments on the status of wild populations of death-watch beetle. The species is, in fact, pretty generally widespread through the lowlands of England, wherever there are large old open-grown oaks. I am aware of records from parkland and field oaks from as far north as Yorkshire, e.g., from Beningbrough Park (grid reference SE 516586) in 1999.

This ignorance of the ecology and distribution of wild populations appears to be widespread amongst pest entomologists. A recent paper by S. R. Belmain, W. M. Blaney and M. S. J. Simmonds (1998, *Ent. Exp. Appl.* **89**: 193-199) states that "The natural death-watch beetle habitat is hypothesised to be limited to dead and dying trees". This misconception that death-watch beetle needs unhealthy or dead trees has been drawn to the authors attention, but I received no response.

The key habitat requirement of death-watch beetle is for accessible heartwood – the dead woody tissues which form the core of the trunk of any *live* tree of any size – and the beetle is perfectly capable of running through its life cycle in a living healthy tree, provided that there is access to the disfunctional, ie. dead, heartwood within. I am aware of literally hundreds of living, *healthy*, ancient oak trees with exit-holes in exposed areas of heartwood. Hickin (1981, *The Woodworm Problem*. Rentokil Library) is much more accurate when he states that "Its outdoor habitats consist of dead wood in trees or dead branches of several hardwood species where fungal decay occurs".— K. N. A. ALEXANDER, The National Trust, 33 Sheep Street, Cirencester, Gloucestershire GL7 1RQ.

Hazards of butterfly collecting – the non-turbulent priest – Ghana 1994

We left on KLM as usual, on a trip to Ghana via Amsterdam; KLM gave us good service and cheap prices; their Ghana office had also waived restrictions and penalties on changing dates of return flights. My wife was also on the flight, but this was in the good old days of smoking on board, so I was down in smoking, and she was up in non-smoking. I settled down with a *Guardian*, just off the press.

Soon the seat next to me was occupied by one of those tropicalized Catholic priests who have seen it all, with a safari jacket above the clerical garb. He was